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PARIS FOR JROSENBLATT; WJORDAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/25/2018  
TAGS: PREL PGOV IZ FR  
SUBJECT: KOUCHNER TO VISIT IRAQ MAY 31-JUNE 1

REF: A. (A) PARIS 901

1B. (B) PARIS CLASSIFIED NOTES - MAY 23  
1C. 2008

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for Reasons 1.4d/b

11. (S/NF) In a May 25 meeting, French Political Counselor Sylvain Fourriere told DepPolCouns that French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner will visit Baghdad, Nasiriyah and Erbil May 31-June 1 (Ref A). Fourriere dismissed speculation Kouchner would visit Iraq after attending the ICI conference in Stockholm, noting Kouchner's busy schedule and arguing (not entirely convincingly) that the French Foreign Minister could not be everywhere at once. He described the trip as a show of "political support," and said Kouchner expects to meet President Talabani, Prime Minister Maliki, and SRSG di Mistura in Baghdad, and KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani and perhaps KRG President Massud Barzani in Erbil. Although the French embassy had recommended a stop in Basrah, Kouchner opted for Nasiriyah for "symbolic reasons." (Note: Nasiriyah is Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi's hometown. The Shi'a VP, who has strong ties to France where he owns property and has family, will be Kouchner's host for that portion of the trip. End Note.) Fourriere also asked for a Crocker/Kouchner meeting, which DepPolCouns explained may not be possible because of Ambassador Crocker's anticipated absence from Baghdad. We promised to notify the French should a change in the Ambassador's schedule permit a meeting with the French FM.

12. (S/NF) Fourriere volunteered that the French Embassy has only discussed the Kouchner trip with the U.S. Embassy and a restricted circle of high-ranking GOI and KRG officials. He explained there would be no advance notice, and griped that the GOI still had not formally agreed to the visit. Fourriere welcomed our offer to work behind the scenes to ensure the visit runs smoothly. Kouchner will use a French military aircraft (possibly a C-130) for this trip, and Fourriere said a French Liaison Officer (LNO) with CENTCOM was prepared to assist with landing rights and other military-related issues.

13. (S/NF) In a phone conversation with DepPolCouns the next day, Fourriere reported that Kouchner plans to fly directly to Nasiriyah early on the morning of the 31st. He will then travel to Baghdad where he will overnight at a location still TBD, possibly within President Talabani's Karradah compound. On June 1 he will fly to Erbil for a ceremony to inaugurate the new French Consulate and return to France later that day. During the same conversation, Fourriere surprised us by requesting USG assistance - air assets - to transport French Ambassador Jean Francois Girault and four staff members to meet the FM in Nasiriyah.

14. (S/NF) COMMENT. In the May 25 meeting, Fourriere would not elaborate on the conflicts preventing Foreign Minister Kouchner from attending the Stockholm ICI conference, and

struck us as a bit evasive on the subject. On the other hand, he seemed genuinely pleased with our offer to be helpful with the Foreign Minister's Baghdad visit - and confirmed our impression with his follow-up call the next day. The request for Mission air assets represents a notable departure from the French embassy's previous policy of minimizing U.S. Mission and MNF footprint on its activities and we are exploring ways to provide the support the French want. While Fourriere stressed that other foreign representatives had visited Nasiriyah (also the site of a 2003 truck bombing that killed 17 Italian Carabinieri), we suspect Kouchner's stopover may be an attempt in part to smooth feathers ruffled by President Sarkozy's recent snub (Ref B). MNF-I colleagues also strongly urged that we loop in France's CENTCOM LNO as soon as possible to avoid the type of mishap (one hour circling over Baghdad International Airport because of uncertainty whether Kouchner's aircraft was military or civilian) that the FM experienced during his August 2007 Baghdad visit. END COMMENT.

CROCKER